

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY OF GENDER

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The social psychology of gender, broadly defined, examines the ways gender shapes and is shaped by social interaction. This includes the cognitive processes through which gender influences the way we perceive, interpret, and respond to our social world; it also includes the mechanisms through which interaction defines and transmits meaning about gender. This definition is congruent with modern theories that increasingly view gender as an institutionalized system of practices for constituting people as two different categories (men and women), and organizing relations of inequality based on this difference (Ferree, Lorber & Hess, 1999; Lorber, 1994; Nakano Glenn, 1999; Ridgeway, 1997; Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999; Risman, 1998). In other words, gender is not simply (or primarily) a trait of individuals; it is also an organizing principle of all social systems, including families, work, schools, economic and legal systems, and everyday interactions.

Scholarship conceptualizing gender as an institution encompasses three levels of analysis: individual, interactional, and structural (e.g., Risman, 1998). The individual level refers to stable traits of men and women that endure over time, such as differences believed to be rooted in biology or early childhood socialization. The interactional level examines the ways in which social behavior is constrained or facilitated by expectations that people have regarding the traits men and women possess, the ways they

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should act, and the beliefs they should hold. The structural level addresses how macro level patterns, such as the positions to which people are assigned in society or the rewards attached to those positions, lead to differences in the behavior or experiences of men and women. Current and recent research in the social psychology of gender most often focuses on the interactional level, examining how gendered expectations shape behavior.

The contemporary social psychology of gender, with its focus on interaction, looks considerably different from earlier social psychological approaches to gender. In fact, the current understanding of gender emerged largely out of a critique of the social psychology of gender as it existed in the 1970s and 1980s (for an early critique see [Lopata & Thorne, 1978](#)). At that time, individual-level sex role/socialization approaches were predominant within both psychology and sociology. Sex role theories generally argue that gender is a product of socialization: through reinforcement, children learn either the male or female “role,” internalize it as an identity, and then enact the behaviors and traits associated with that role as they carry out their adult activities. In this way, gender becomes a mostly stable and durable aspect of who people *are*.

While scholars of gender have been critical of the sex role approach for many reasons described below (see [Connell, 1987](#) or Gerson, 1985 for a review), it is important to understand that sex role theories emerged in response to biological explanations of gender difference. For example, while biological accounts might explain an observed gender difference in a trait such as aggressiveness as resulting from average differences in the level of testosterone between males and females, sex role/socialization accounts might instead locate the source of this observed difference in parenting practices which celebrate aggressive behavior in boys and sanction it in girls. Thus, the movement away from biological theories and towards sex role/socialization theories introduced more malleability and variability into the process of becoming a gendered individual.

However, as gender scholars routinely note, biological and socialization accounts are not as different as they may at first seem. While socialization or “nurture” theories allow for more malleability than biological or “nature” theories, both ultimately view gender as residing in the individual, whether in her biology or in her psychology. Both sets of theories view gender as a relatively stable and distinguishing aspect of who people are, at least by adulthood. These internalized gender differences are thought to be the source of macro level gender patterns and inequalities, such as the segregation of the labor market by gender, the gender gap in wages, and the gendered division of household labor.

One problem with individual level approaches is that they have historically focused on documenting and then explaining gender differences, while ignoring the similarity between men and women and the vast diversity among men and among women. As [Connell \(1987\)](#) notes, if researchers and readers did not start with the assumption that men and women *are* different, decades worth of “sex differences” research might have been more aptly called “sex similarity” research. Indeed in a recent meta analysis of over 120 studies, psychologist Janet [Hyde \(2005\)](#) provides strong evidence in support of the “gender similarity hypothesis.” For 78% of the psychological variables examined in these studies – including measures of preferences for powerful jobs, self-esteem, and mathematics problem solving – the magnitude of the differences between men and women were found to be either small or close to zero. Some gender differences were larger, such as differences in throwing velocity and the frequency of reported masturbation, but interestingly the variables associated with large gender differences are not those that are usually thought to be relevant for explaining gender patterns and inequalities in major life outcomes.

Sex role/socialization theories have also been criticized on a number of other grounds, which we will only briefly note here (for a full review see [Connell, 1987](#)). By positing universalistic definitions of the male and female role, these theories fail to appreciate the ways that race and class affect how gender is experienced. More generally, individuals who do not fit within these universalistic definitions can only be understood in terms of failures of socialization or deviants. Defining gender in terms of male and female “roles” creates an imagery of complimentary, separate but equal roles, which prevents an examination of the relations between men and women, which are often unequal. Further, defining gender as a stable part of who someone is obscures an understanding of the situational nature of gender.

Gender theories have, consequently, moved increasingly from understanding gender in terms of sex differences and sex roles to understanding gender as a multilevel structure that includes cultural beliefs and distributions of resources at the macro level, patterns of behavior at the interactional level, as well as roles and identities at the micro level ([Ferree & Hess, 1987](#); [Ferree et al., 1999](#); [Ridgeway & Correll, 2004](#); [Risman, 1998](#)). Modern theories emphasize that gender is both a structure and a process. Researchers focusing on gender as a structure have shown that many observed gender differences are actually “deceptive distinctions:” differences that appear because men and women occupy different (and unequal) positions in the social structure ([Epstein, 1990](#); [Kanter, 1977](#)). Social psychologists of gender tend to take the complimentary approach of studying gender as a process.

To say that gender is a process is to claim that gender is an on-going interactional accomplishment rather than a given attribute; something one *does* rather than something one *is* (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Rather than being an internalized identity, gender is a set of expectations to which individuals are held accountable while engaging in other seemingly non-gendered activities. Consistent with this idea, research finds that even when men and women are found in similar structural positions, they are often held to different behavioral standards, which can serve to reproduce existing gender inequalities. For example, Rudman (1998) found that, in an interview situation, women interviewees who engaged in self-promoting behavior by describing their past accomplishments were penalized; men who self-promoted incurred no such penalties. Interestingly, self-promotion led to higher competence ratings for both male and female interviewees, but women who self-promoted were judged as less likeable, which decreased the odds that they would be recommended for hire. Thus, what might be considered a “best practice” in interviewing, such as making sure your past accomplishments are known, is less effective for women than men because of the way gender influences the expectations of *others* in interactive settings.

Likewise, in her study of litigators, Pierce (1995) describes a model of litigation that is actively taught to young lawyers and involves the strategic use of displays of anger in dealing with some witnesses and opposing counsel. This model is widely accepted as highly effective; however, it turns out to not be as effective for women litigators because of the way their colleagues, juries, and judges react to women displaying the emotion of anger. Thus, the “best” way of carrying out the role of litigator is blocked from women, who have to adopt a more gender acceptable, but less valued, strategy for carrying out their work.

In sum, while older sex role approaches viewed gendered individuals as existing in gender-neutral social structures and interactions, current understandings of gender as a multilevel system view gendered individuals as occupying gendered positions in society, and their everyday interactions in those positions as being shaped by gender expectations. Gender resides both within and *beyond* individuals.

## **WHAT CAN SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY CONTRIBUTE TO OUR UNDERSTANDINGS OF GENDER?**

The paradigmatic shift in gender theory, which focuses attention away from the individual and toward structural accounts, has undoubtedly advanced

the amount and quality of research on gender as a macro-level phenomenon. However, social psychological accounts of gender have been less frequent among gender scholars in sociology, perhaps due to the perception that studying individuals might reinvigorate sex role and socialization accounts. This concern is especially understandable since sociology as a field has yet to fully incorporate current theories of gender (Stacey & Thorne, 1985; Ferree & Hall, 1996). For example, Ferree and Hall (1996) have shown that many introductory sociology textbooks still present gender as simply the product of socialization, even while examining other bases of inequality, such as race and class, at a structural level. Rather than rehearsing past debates, we argue that social psychological perspectives make a unique contribution to bridging the multiple levels of the gender system, and are especially well suited to helping us understand the ways that gender is achieved through interaction. Understanding gender as an interactive process sheds light on how structural conditions constrain individual choices as well as how structural patterns of gender inequality are generated and recreated. Discovering mechanisms at the micro level, which play an active role in the persistence of inequality, is especially fruitful because they suggest ways by which gender inequality might be lessened.

To illustrate the usefulness of this perspective, we highlight four specific contributions that social psychology can make to our understanding of gender. First, it offers a way to evaluate whether apparently individual gender differences might instead be the product of gendered expectations. Second, it can explain how structural constraints support the emergence of gender inequality through interaction and relegate women to lower status positions. Third, it addresses legitimacy issues that can prevent women in high status positions from benefiting from those positions as much as otherwise equivalent men. Fourth, it can help us understand how gender inequality could emerge in new contexts (such as new organizational forms) that have no history of gender inequality.

As gender theories in sociology and other fields moved towards more macro level theorizing, scholarship within psychological and sociological social psychology also moved away from the static notion of sex roles and towards a more contextual, situational understanding of gender that is inherently interactional (Deaux & Major, 1987). For example, social psychologists have shown that even gender differences in aggression, a trait that has long been associated with definitions of masculinity, are contextually dependent. In one compelling study, Lightdale and Prentice (1994) conducted an experiment where participants played an interactive video game in which they defended their territory and then attacked one

another by dropping bombs. In the condition where participants knew that others (the experimenter and other participants) would be aware of their behavior, men dropped significantly more bombs than women, demonstrating the classic gender difference in aggressive behavior. However, in another condition, where participants knew that their behavior would not be monitored, women dropped slightly more bombs than men, although the difference was not significant. In other words, gender differences in aggressive behavior were shown to be the result of accountability to others, rather than internalized differences. Socialization theories within social psychology have similarly become more contextual and have increasingly highlighted the active role of children in the socialization process, thereby focusing more on the process of how individuals acquire gender and allowing more variability in both process and outcomes (Martin, 1998).

An important consequence of this shift in social psychological research toward focusing on the contextual nature of gender in interaction is its ability to explain the emergence of certain types of gender inequality. Integrating social psychological perspectives with macro-level research on structural gender inequality enables scholars to identify how one's position and resources in the context of the broader social structure both shape the type of interactions people encounter, and how those interactions reciprocally shape the social structure itself. For instance, observed patterns of structural inequality, such as occupational sex segregation and the high likelihood of same-sex network ties, indicate that women rarely meet men in status-equal, role-similar interactions (Cabrera & Thomas-Hunt, this volume; Smith-Lovin & McPherson, 1993; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999). Instead, they frequently are in interactions where men are in more powerful, agentic roles, and women are in more supportive roles. In this way, the repetition of status unequal interactions between men and women reinforces cultural beliefs about gender differences (Eagly & Steffen, 1984; Ridgeway, 1991). This is particularly problematic because when women do find themselves in interactions where they have a higher status relation to men (e.g., as leaders or managers), they often encounter a series of barriers that can make it more difficult for them to exercise their high status role, as many papers in this volume show.

A third on-going contribution of social psychology toward bridging multiple levels of analysis has been to develop a set of rich, empirically supported accounts of the way gendered beliefs and expectations limit the ability of women to enact high status, or even equal status, roles. Importantly, these accounts outline how individual behavior is constrained, though not fully determined, by macro-level gender beliefs. For example,

research in expectation states theory and shifting standards theory has shown that because gender status beliefs include widely shared assumptions that women are generally less competent or status worthy than men, women are frequently judged by a harsher ability standard, both by themselves and others (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 1997; Fuegen, this volume; Foschi, 1989; Correll, 2004). They likewise face a lack of legitimacy when placed in high status roles (Ridgeway & Berger, 1986).

Research on prescriptive stereotyping has accordingly shown that even when women can overcome doubts about their workplace competence, they are still subjected to discrimination based on beliefs about what roles or behaviors are appropriate for men and women. Heilman (2001) explains that women who violate prescriptive stereotypes by taking on stereotypically masculine roles (such as leadership roles) or behaviors (such as being assertive or self-promoting) face two kinds of reactions. First, they are derogated as interpersonally hostile – cold, deceitful, bitter, selfish, devious, and other negative attributions. Second, they are personally disliked. Even positive stereotypes, such as beliefs that women are warmer or more nurturing, can lead to disadvantages for women in the workplace, such as assigning women more caregiving type roles at work (see Rudman & Phelan, this volume). And, as the Pierce (1995) study cited earlier shows, beliefs about the types of emotional displays that are appropriate for women can also limit women's ability to enact the emotional component of certain high status occupational roles, such as litigator. Taken as a whole, the degree to which individuals are able to negotiate gender expectations in the varied contexts of their interactions largely influences the supply and demand side processes generating macro-structural patterns of gender inequality.

By articulating these interactional processes, social psychology provides a fourth contribution: an explanation for why gender inequality emerges in new settings with no prior history of gender bias, such as new organizational forms. As Ridgeway points out in this volume and elsewhere (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004; Ridgeway & Smith-Lovin, 1999), repeated interactions that are implicitly based on gender status beliefs can reshape the form of gender inequality under new situational conditions and organizational structures. Importantly, social psychology has also suggested ways in which organizations can adjust their policies and practices to avoid perpetuating inequality (for an overview see Valian, 1999). For example, people can avoid unconsciously discriminating against others to the extent that they are motivated to do so (Tetlock, 1983; Kunda & Spencer, 2003; Fein, Hoshino-Brown, Davies, & Spencer, 2003), and able to exert the cognitive effort necessary to monitor their own behavior for the influence of stereotypes

(Devine, 1989; Bodenhausen, 1990; Wilson & Brekke, 1994). To reduce stereotypic gender biases in hiring, organizations can make changes to increase employees' motivation to avoid stereotyping, such as requiring them to account for their hiring decisions to an impartial higher authority (e.g., Foschi, 1996). Organizations can also make changes to ensure that employees have sufficient cognitive resources to self-monitor, for example, by allowing plenty of time for hiring decisions to be made so that decision makers are not forced to make rushed decisions (which may be more likely to be biased) (Valian, 1999).

The ability of social psychology to examine the way gender influences and is influenced by social context is the primary reason why we find this line of work to be especially promising. By specifying the ways in which individuals are held accountable to gender beliefs even while they are enacting seemingly non-gendered roles, social psychology provides insight into the "doing gender" process (West & Zimmerman, 1987). This gives it the potential to shed light on the subtle type of biases that appear to be especially important in limiting women's advancement in today's workplaces (Valian, 1999). However, more research still needs to be done in these areas, such as developing better understandings of how gendered expectations about competence and emotional displays influence men and women's enactment of their occupational roles.

## THE USE OF LABORATORY EXPERIMENTS IN STUDYING GENDER

Many of the chapters in this book summarize the results of previous experimental studies, or report the results of new experiments. These chapters reflect the assumption, widespread in social psychology, that the experimental method is a useful tool with which to increase our understanding of the ways in which gender shapes social life. However, many gender scholars have viewed experimental research with reservation or even suspicion (for an excellent review of these concerns see Sprague, 2005). These reservations are understandable in light of the historical context of gender issues in science. Women were long excluded from science as practitioners (Sprague, 2005, pp. 43–44), and were at times used as research subjects in exploitative and unethical ways (Sprague, 2005, pp. 19–20). Furthermore, some scientists explicitly sought to prove that women were inferior to men, and systematically disregarded evidence that contradicted this assumption (Sprague, 2005, pp. 35–36). While sensitive to these concerns, we nonetheless



believe that experiments can provide important insights into issues that are of key concern to gender scholars, such as causal evidence for the existence of and mechanisms underlying gender discrimination.

The distinguishing feature of experiments, relative to other quantitative methods, is that the researcher manipulates the independent variable of interest in order to measure its effect on the dependent variable, rather than measuring correlations present in existing data (Aronson, Ellsworth, Carlsmith, & Gonzales, 1990). When manipulation of the independent variable is combined with experimental control of other features of the setting and random assignment of participants into experimental conditions, experiments have the unique ability to establish causality. Importantly for gender scholars, this means experiments can shed empirical light on important processes that tend to be intractable with other methods. Experiments, like all methods, have their limits. But we believe that evidence from experiments can be a valuable part of the knowledge base for scholars working in a given substantive area.

Experiments examining discrimination in labor market settings offer a good example of the unique kind of evidence that experiments can provide. Despite widespread reports of gender inequality, many people remain reluctant to acknowledge that discrimination exists, and some believe that men are systematically disadvantaged relative to women (Rhode, 1997). Establishing that gender discrimination occurs using non-experimental social science data can be difficult. In the case of the gender wage gap, for example, surveys cannot distinguish between discrimination accounts (women are paid less because of bias) and productivity accounts (women are paid less because they are less efficient workers) (see Budig & England, 2001 for an extended discussion of this problem).

However, using an experiment, researchers interested in whether women face gender bias in the hiring process might ask study participants to evaluate a set of job applications, and experimentally vary whether an applicant appears to be a man or a woman, while holding other relevant variables constant (for an overview of the “application files” design, see Foschi, 2006). For example, by asking participants to evaluate identical resumes that vary only on the gender of the applicant, the researcher can rule out the possibility that any systematic differences in the applications (education, experience, etc.) influenced the evaluation of men and women. By ruling out competing explanations, experiments can provide evidence of gender discrimination with a level of certainty unavailable with other methods. The strength of this evidence is apparent in the role experiments have played in the courtroom, as in the historic United States Supreme

Court *Price Waterhouse v. Hopkins* sex discrimination case (see Fiske, Bersoff, Borgida, Deaux, & Heilman, 1991).

Although the experimental method offers several unique advantages to researchers, it has also garnered criticism from some gender scholars. Sprague (2005) reviews two concerns that scholars have raised regarding the experimental method. The first concern is that the abstract nature of an experiment, by removing participants and activities from their normal context, may mask power relations that exist in everyday settings (Sprague 2005, p. 82). The second concern is that, because experiments often use samples composed of undergraduate students, they may disproportionately reflect the experiences of elites (Sprague 2005, p. 89). We now turn to addressing both of these concerns.

We acknowledge that, when conducting an experiment, one runs the risk of overlooking the importance of power relations in a particular setting. However, it is important to note that this is a potential shortcoming of any given research design, rather than a flaw inherent in the experimental method. In fact, we believe that a well-designed experiment can be ideally suited to addressing issues of power relations in interactional contexts. The exercise of power in interpersonal relations is often difficult to observe in natural settings, as it is covariant with other factors. By methodically varying elements of the situation, experiments can expose the existence of power and the mechanisms behind aspects of it that would otherwise be difficult to detect. For example, experimental research has shown that men's sexual harassment of women varies with contextual factors such as threats to masculine identity and the apparent legitimacy of male privilege (Maass, Cadinu, Guarnieri, & Grasselli, 2003).

The second concern is one of external validity (Sprague 2005, p. 89). Most experiments are conducted on college and university campuses, and as a result, study participants tend to be drawn from students at those institutions. Using college students as research participants may limit the conclusions one can draw from this research; in particular, the results of such research may disproportionately represent the experiences of elites.

It is true that college students do not represent a random sample from the population. The behavior of college students thus may not generalize to other populations, but the extent to which this is true depends on the particular research question being asked. For example, the application file experiments mentioned above seek to predict the decisions managers will make when faced with hiring decisions. Research comparing the behavior of college students to actual managers in this setting suggests that they tend to offer very similar appraisals of applicants (Cleveland & Berman, 1987). In a

meta-analysis, [Olian and Schwab \(1988\)](#) found no significant difference between managers and student evaluators in the effect size of applicant gender on applicant ratings and hiring decisions. [Correll, Benard, and Paik \(2007\)](#) examined discrimination against mothers using both a laboratory resumé evaluation study and an audit study in which the researchers sent resúmes to actual firms and measured the rate at which prospective employers contacted the applicants. They found the same pattern of means and similar effect sizes across both studies, which suggests that, at least for some research questions, college student samples can approximate real-world samples quite well. In general, the question of how well the characteristics of a college student sample approximate those of another population of interest is an important one, and the answer varies depending on the specific research question.

The broader response to concerns about external validity is that experiments are designed to test causal arguments, not to generalize to broader populations ([Zelditch, 1969](#)). Thus, to criticize experiments for a lack of external validity is equivalent to criticizing survey research for failing to prove causality or ethnographic research for failing to generalize beyond the specific place and time in which it was conducted. While these criticisms may be technically valid, they overlook the goals and unique contributions of each method.

Importantly, the strengths and weaknesses of these and other methods tend to be complimentary – each can answer questions that the others cannot. For example, experimental resumé evaluation studies, survey data on work experiences and earnings, and ethnographic fieldwork within organizations intersect to provide much richer information regarding the role of gender in structuring the labor market experiences of men and women than any of these methods alone.

## OVERVIEW OF THE VOLUME

This volume contains contributions from scholars in sociology, psychology, and organizational behavior. While scholars working in the group processes tradition and those working in the area of sociology of gender share many insights about what gender is and how it functions, the literatures from these two fields are all too rarely in conversation with each other. Both tend to see gender as a property of structure rather than a trait of individuals learned in childhood. Both view gender as contextual and variable, rather than fixed and durable. One of the goals of this volume then is to help bridge this divide.

The first paper, Laurie A. Rudman and Julie E. Phelan's "Sex Differences, Sexism, and Sex: The Social Psychology of Gender from Past to Present," reviews the history of gender research in psychology, and in particular provides excellent accounts of research on "benevolent sexism" and "backlash effects." Benevolent sexism is the tendency to attribute qualities to women that are positively valued, but which also undermine their status in the workplace; backlash effects most commonly occur when agentic women are punished for violating normative assumptions about how women should behave. Both concepts play a role in explaining why women continue to experience disadvantages in the labor market, despite changing attitudes about women's overall competence. This paper will be especially valuable to researchers interested in inequality or work and occupations.

The next chapter, Madeline E. Heilman and Elizabeth J. Parks-Stamm's, "Gender Stereotypes in the Workplace: Obstacles to Women's Career Progress," is an outstanding overview of work by the authors and others on gender stereotyping. The authors' theoretical framework includes both descriptive stereotypes (beliefs about how men and women are), and prescriptive stereotypes (beliefs about how men and women should be) and their effects on the career outcomes of women and men. They describe a wealth of studies documenting the conditions under which descriptive stereotypes bias evaluations of women's performance, and prescriptive stereotypes lead evaluators to view women negatively even when their performance decisively refutes descriptive stereotypes. The authors also discuss ways in which organizations might structure their evaluation processes to avoid bias. This paper makes a significant contribution by providing thorough and engaging accounts of two forms of bias that affect women's careers.

Kathleen Fuegen's chapter, "The Effects of Gender Stereotypes on Judgments and Decisions in Organizations," discusses recent research on how gendered expectations change the standards that evaluators use in making hiring and firing decisions. The key findings from this research are that women tend to be held to lower minimum standards but higher confirmatory standards in assessments of competence, and higher minimum standards but lower confirmatory standards in assessments of *in*competence. However, these findings are contingent on the gender of the evaluator. Fuegen closes by identifying a number of open research questions in the field. This chapter should be an important resource for anyone interested in developing a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of how gender affects organizational decision-making.

The following chapter by Mina Cikara and Susan T. Fiske builds on earlier chapters by bringing together the abundant literatures supporting

status characteristics theory, the stereotype content model, and ambivalent sexism theory (which addresses hostile and benevolent sexism). In doing so, they highlight how women's choices often reflect a pragmatic approach to their alternatives, rather than explicit consent to hierarchical gender relations. The authors outline how a variety of processes, such as stereotyping that generates paternalistic pity and envious prejudice, nonverbal behavior eliciting dominance and submissiveness, and the interdependent quality of heterosexual relations, often leave women in a double bind that provides few options for attaining "soft" power through interaction, which is dependent upon being both liked and respected. This review will be fruitful for researchers interested in the especially subtle qualities of interactional processes that reproduce unequal relationships between men and women across a wide variety of settings.

Next, a chapter by Susan F. Cabrera and Melissa C. Thomas-Hunt, "'Street Cred' and the Executive Woman: The Effects of Gender Differences in Social Networks on Career Advancement," provides an exceptional example of the value of examining the interaction between structural and social psychological factors. Their paper proposes a model predicting executive hiring patterns, and reviews network research relevant to establishing credibility, one key facet of the model. An important theme of their paper is that homophily – the psychological principle stating that people tend to seek interactions with similar others – can be differentially effective for men and women, as men tend to occupy more high status positions within organizations. Their work is broadly relevant for scholars interested in gender, inequality, organizations, and networks.

The next chapter by Cathryn Johnson and colleagues begins with an engaging review of the theoretical and empirical literature on gender and emotions that should be useful to social psychologists and others who are new to this important area of gender scholarship. The authors then present results from an experimental vignette study that examines how gender and contextual factors affect participants' emotional responses to a situation where they have experienced injustice by not being chosen for a position even though they are well qualified. Interestingly, and consistent with research in other areas of social psychology, they find that contextual factors matter more than an individual's gender. In particular, they find that the gender of the decision maker has a stronger effect on participants' emotional responses than does their own gender.

The subsequent chapter by Jeremy Freese and James D. Montgomery empirically and formally evaluates the hypothesis that women are more religious than men because they are more risk-averse and therefore are

more motivated by the threat of punishment in the afterlife. As the authors note, women have been shown to be more religious than men in the U.S. and elsewhere. Using a cross-national sample they find that, contrary to the predictions of risk-preference theory, gender differences in religiosity are no smaller for those individuals who do not believe in hell compared with those who do. What might explain this consistent gender difference if not differences in risk-aversion? As the authors note, this question raises the more general issue of whether observed differences in men and women's behavior are the results of men and women facing different "choice problems" with similar psychology versus facing similar choice problems with different psychology (regardless of the origins of those psychological differences). This question is important as it pushes us to consider foundational questions about what the social psychology of gender is and how in a given decision-making context, it might produce gender differences in observed behavior.

Karin A. Martin and colleagues similarly speak to foundational questions by invigorating a new perspective on the process of childhood socialization, during which children alter, resist, and manage conflicting discourses, interactions, and social structures. Using this framework, they make a strong case for the need for more research on the sexual socialization of young children, that is, how children come to understand sexuality and the structures that support it, given their exposure to partial and potentially conflicting sources of meaning. The authors discuss research agendas that could speak to a broad array of issues, such as childhood sexual abuse, the strategies and behaviors of adolescent sexuality, how sexuality comes to be socially constructed as it intersects with other forms of identity, and how children play an active role in this process. In doing so, they provide a good starting point for anyone interested in the links between gender and sexuality, or the mechanisms reinforcing the hegemony of heterosexuality.

The following chapter by Jeffrey W. Lucas and colleagues presents results from two experiments that examine the effect of gender and status processes on self-handicapping (selecting actions that can impair future performances). The widespread finding that men tend to self-handicap more than women has been surmised to play a role in women's relative academic success. However, the results of this study suggest that men's higher likelihood of self-handicapping is related to concerns about protecting their status or self image: Both experiments find that men, but not women, are more likely to self-handicap when they are in a high status position. These findings are noteworthy in that they demonstrate how gender processes

may inform one's strategies for preserving their status position in a given situation.

The next paper by Kevin T. Leicht and colleagues proposes a novel social psychological explanation for the predominance of women on college campuses, a recent trend that has puzzled scholars and the public alike. After presenting evidence that labor market factors cannot account for the increasing proportion of women college students, the authors develop a social identity explanation, suggesting that men may avoid college because cultural understandings of the student role, while congruent with feminine identities, are in conflict with masculine identities. In other words, students respond to gendered cultural expectations about the student role in developing educational aspirations and orientations. Results from a survey of students on five college campuses provide tentative support for the social identity explanation. The authors then develop a new experimental paradigm that promises to provide rich data that will allow us to better understand how gender identities shape educational performance and outcomes.

The volume concludes with Cecilia L. Ridgeway's chapter, "Gender as a Group Process: Implications for the Persistence of Inequality," which tackles the important question of why gender inequality persists in the face of economic and institutional changes that increasingly de-emphasize difference based on gender. She argues that viewing gender as a group process, rather than an individual phenomenon, is crucial in this regard. Gender is a broadly encompassing cultural tool for coordinating behavior at the interpersonal level, such that gender has become, at some level, a part of every sphere of social life. Additionally, cultural beliefs about difference and status based on gender greatly impact behavior and bias judgments. Due to confirmation bias and the institutionalization of shared gender stereotypes through the media, laws and social policies, and the organization of public places, there is a lag between changes in men and women's material experience and changes in gender stereotypes. It is precisely during this window of opportunity that people fall back on old stereotypes to help them make sense of new structural conditions. Despite these hurdles, the author argues that the erosion of such stereotypes can occur with enough repetition of the material changes that continue to shape men and women's lives.

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